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ABSTRACT

Secondary school students must gain increasing independence in the reading study skills in order to meet the requirements of current subject demands. Many students do not know how to apply the study skills effectively. Nor do these skills seem to be taught, and the students do not seem to acquire competency by instinct. When providing the students with instruction in the study skills, the teacher must emphasize techniques for attacking an assignment effectively, and the teacher's own classroom procedure should exemplify the techniques to be used. The teacher can do four things with the students. First, an overview of the material should be given to denote the author's treatment. Second, the students' backgrounds should be expanded and filled in as necessary. Third, basic conceptual terms should be noted and clarified. And fourth, the students should be directed to read for specific purposes. The students should understand this procedure and incorporate it into their own habits of study. They should also learn to implement the Survey-Question-Read-Recite-Review (SQ3R) study formula and to see the similarities between the formula and the teacher's classroom technique. References are included. (Author/NH)

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SECONDARY READING: GUIDING PUPILS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE IN STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

Secondary school students must gain increasing independence in the reading study skills in order to meet the requirements of current subject requirements. Many students do not know how to apply the study skills effectively. Nor do they seem to be caught and the students do not seem to acquire competency by instinct. When providing the students with instruction in the study skills, the teacher will need to emphasize techniques of attacking an assignment effectively. The teachers own classroom procedure should exemplify the techniques the student is to use. The teacher will need to do four things with the students. One, an overview of the material is done to denote the author's treatment of the material. Second, the student's background is expanded and filled in as necessary. Third, basic conceptual terms are noted and clarified. And finally, the student is directed to read for specific purposes. The student should understand this procedure and incorporate it into his own habits of study. The student should also learn how to implement the SQ3R study formula. He should be guided to see the similarities between the formula and the teacher's classroom technique.

School tradition has seemed to expect high school students to be independent in their study. They are supposed to know how to obtain information and understandings from the textbook and reference material. And though we know that all high school students are not independent, we none-the-less suspect that they could be if they would expend the effort. In general the continuum of education from kindergarten through grade 12 is viewed as mostly skill development in the beginning school years which diminishes each year as the child progresses toward the twelfth grade. Conversely, the subject content is viewed as very slight in the primary grades but increases steadily as the child progresses.

In serious thought most educators would say they disagree with these statements. They would say, "Of course, we know that high school students need guidance in independent study." Practice, however, does not seem to bear this out. Artley has reported, "Several regional and statewide studies indicate that there is a decline in reading growth beginning at about the age of entrance into junior high school. This lag in growth is not only relative to that maintained throughout the primary-elementary years, but also lower in relation to the normal and consistent increase in mental age. That this situation need not exist is indicated by the many studies showing that students on all levels from the dullest to the brightest showed significant improvement when reading instruction, either developmental or corrective, was provided. The assumption might be made that the negative acceleration on the secondary level is even greater than is apparent, since the test norms with which comparisons were made were based on existing rather than hypothetically ideal levels of achievement.

Studies indicate that a number of factors and conditions, operating either singly or in combination, may account for this disturbing condition.

The most apparent reason is that there is little concerted effort to provide systematic reading instruction beyond grade six as is provided on the earlier grade levels. In fact, one major study showed that, of the several language arts areas, reading received the least amount of instructional time."[1]

High school pupils themselves are anxious to upgrade the skills leading toward independence in study. Often they do not articulate their need in quite this manner but say they need to read faster or they do not remember what they read and so on. In the past two years 590 students have enrolled at the Hofstra University Reading Clinic for instruction in the study skills. These pupils are not remedial students. Some may need slight corrective help, but some are obtaining top honors in their respective schools. At an expense to themselves and their families they enroll to gain greater competence at mastery of the reading--study process. These students report no such program in their schools. Their subject area teachers are content oriented. These students perceive the close relationship between their competence in specific reading-study skills and the mastery of the subject content through reading.

The course at the Hofstra University Reading Clinic is geared to the student needs for competence. Instruction is extended in such skills as: finding main ideas, noting the relationship of details to main ideas, following the author's pattern, noting his purpose, outlining, note taking, locating information, and so on. As you can see, these skills fall into the areas of vocabulary development, comprehension, rate of reading, reference skills, and study technique. Whereas each area is more than the subject of one paper, I will put major emphasis here on one - the study technique.

Attacking the Assignment

Specifically, students need to know how to attack an assignment effectively for obtaining and using information. Also they must do so efficiently so that

undue time is not expended. Further, proper study technique and the skills of vocabulary, comprehension, speed, and reference interact upon each other.

When asked how they fulfill the requirements of an assignment to read material and to use the information contained therein, most secondary students give evidence of ineffective methods of study. The comments range from, "I just read the chapter and try to answer the questions," to "I look for the answers to the question. I don't read all of the material unless I have to." Many say they try to do the assignment hurriedly because of other subject assignment commitments. Obviously the students are not using techniques which are known to be effective in study. In a discussion of assignments as the key to achievement, Williams and Black note that "underachieving students usually bring to their assignments limited vocabulary, poor comprehension, narrow background experience, and undefined purposes for learning. They lack organizational skills and the ability to examine abstract concepts. These disadvantages become crucial when students are asked to complete an assignment without meaningful guidance."[2]

Students are in great difficulty when they are asked to complete an assignment without meaningful guidance. The question which can be asked here is where the student should get guidance in doing his assignment. The obvious answer, of course, is from each subject area teacher. Marksheffel concurs when he asks the broader question regarding study skills in general, "Are Study Skills Learned Without Guidance?" He answers his question by stating:

> Study skills must be taught. Few students learn how to study efficiently without directed practice and guidance by a teacher. And there are basic study skills that students must learn and use for successful classroom learning.[3]

Suppose we would find all subject area teachers agreeable to the idea and practice of helping their students acquire independence in study. What could the teacher do? What kind of instruction would be most beneficial?

The whole area of study technique is vast and encompasses more than can be presented except by broad generalities. Therefore, attention will be directed to two important and fundamental facets of study technique. All of them refer to teaching procedure in the classroom. The first to be investigated is classroom presentation of subject matter so that students will have adequate background and direction for study. The second expands the first in suggesting how the student may proceed independently from the classroom procedure.

Teaching Procedure - Making the Assignment

The presentation of subject matter in a classroom can be viewed as an intrinsic part of assignment making. It should lead the student to successful independent study. When beginning a lesson the teacher has basically four steps to include. These steps involve giving the student an overview of the material so that he can see how the topic is treated-- the scope, emphasis, and depth of information. Next, background must be expanded as necessary. The student must be able to tie the new materials to his general background of information. Third, basic new vocabulary words may need to be investigated. Such words would signal the major concepts and understandings to be obtained. And finally, purposes for reading will need to be developed. The student needs to look for information of some nature as he reads. These four steps provide the bases and guidance to the reading and study pupils will do. Assignment making is not rigid. The steps are intertwined. These four steps may be done as they would fit naturally in conjunction with each other whenever the teacher introduces a new topic.

What is involved in an overview? Let's suppose the teacher is beginning the study of Jacksonian Democracy and has the students open their textbooks to the chapter. The teacher would at first look through the chapter with the pupils. The title, "Jacksonian Democracy" would likely be a concept to the

material. The students may be asked what they think is meant by this term. The introductory paragraphs, usually a special beginning section or the first one to three paragraphs, may give a clue. If such a phrase, "the first 'common man' to be elected President," is noted, discuss briefly what this may indicate about the nature of Jacksonian Democracy. A purpose question may evolve to note other evidence from the material that would explain the term more fully. Then the teacher may continue with the overview by calling attention to the major sections such as Jackson being the people's choice, the controversy over nullification, the war on the U. S. Bank and the Panic of 1837. Specific topical headings would be noted such as "The spoils system." It may be possible that the student will have some idea of what it is. If not, another purpose question could be noted, -- What is the spoils system? Students could be shown how topical headings in bold face type can many times be expressed as a question thereby giving a very specific purpose question. Pictures, maps, charts, cartoons--all pictorial aids--can be viewed with the teacher directing the student's attention by a question. If necessary, the questions, vocabulary list and suggested activities found at the end of the chapter can be profitable in giving the student ideas of the information included. Some chapters have summary statements which the student will find valuable in giving him an idea of the salient points covered.

Background for adequate understanding is begun when the class is getting an overview of the topic. If necessary the teacher may use various audio-visual media to supplement the overview -- such things as recordings of speeches, songs; films showing events of the period; picture, artifacts and such. By questioning the students the teacher will be able to elicit from them information from previous learning which may bear upon the topic. Students seem often not to realize how much they know from their general background until the information

is prompted by questions. Thus the remembered background plus the overview and other needed supplementary information will provide the student with a fund of known knowledge to use as an anchor to the new information he will be attaining.

Basic vocabulary has already been partically discerned during the overview. Such terms as Jacksonian Democracy, spoils system, nullification, Panic of 1837, were noted in sectional headings or in bold face topical headings. Also, some of the new key terms may be readily spotted since they are often italicized. Meanings for these key terms should be evolved or noted. The number should be kept small so that the student does not become bogged down with new words. Therefore, the teacher will need to determine those terms which are fundamental and must be known by the student if he is to obtain a fundamental understanding of the material as he reads it. Usually no more than five are introduced at this time. These terms should contribute to the development of basic concepts. In fact Herber states:

> A person need not know everyword in material he is reading in order to understand what is being said. If he has an understanding of the most important words, he can usually piece together a sufficient understanding of unknown words through context clues to keep him going....
>
> There has been much discussion on the matter of using materials that are written "at the students' reading level." It is really an irrelevant argument when discussing the development of technical vocabulary. Certain language is needed to describe certain concepts. Merely because they are not at the students' reading level is not the issue. The fact remains that the students are studying the concept and, therefore, the vocabulary is essential. We cannot place a grade level value on this type of vocabulary, but only on the depth to which the concept is probed. The question to be raised regards the relevancy of the curriculum to the student, not the technical vocabulary to the curriculum.[4]

Purpose questions are guide questions for reading. The student should be actively searching for specific information whenever he reads. During this part of the classroom procedure the teacher must make sure that the student knows what the purpose questions are. Sometimes teachers have assigned

questions, but the student has failed to realize how to use them in guiding his reading. Gaining independence in study requires the student's grasp of the use of purpose questions. It may be helpful for the teacher to begin to have students evolve questions as the overview, background information and basic vocabulary are being discussed in order to facilitate the transfer to complete student independence. Ronald Cramer maintains that purpose questions prime the reader's critical faculties. And, "if a student makes a prediction and explicitly sets a purpose, he establishes a dialogue between himself and the author."[5] Thus, the student becomes active in the reading process. He begins to think -- to accept, reject, modify, and apply the ideas presented.

Making an assignment involves much intensive teaching on which the teacher must spend as much time as needed by the students in his class. A well made assignment sets the framework for the more detailed study of the material. It heightens and begins the improvement of the study skills involving vocabulary study, comprehension, and the proper rate of reading.

Student Procedure

For a student to become independent in his study he must begin to do the four steps for himself. Robinson has outlined for us the study formula S Q 3R. He states:

> The SQ3R method then consists of five steps: (1) Survey the headings and summaries quickly to get the general ideas which will be developed in the assignment, (2) turn the first heading into a question, (3) Read the whole section through to answer that question, (4) at the end of the headed section stop to Recite from memory on the question and jot the answer down in phrases (Steps 2, 3 and 4 are repeated on each succeeding headed section), and (5) at the end of reading the assignment in this manner then immediately Review the lesson to organize the ideas and recite on the various points to fix them in mind. This higher-level study skill cannot be learned simply by reading about it, it must be practiced under supervision just as with learning any skill.[6]

The formula must be supervised if the student is to become competent in its application to his own study. Each teacher should make known to the

student the steps of his own procedure. The student should have knowledge of the teaching procedure used by his teacher to increase the effectiveness of his own learning. In this way he begins to learn technique as well as subject matter. With a knowledge of technique he begins to be independent.

Certainly the complete scope of the study skills is not included in these suggestions for student independence in study. Nor are the suggestions which are given, all-inclusive for the student acquisition of independence. Such items as student attitude which has been only subtly inferred, and other facets as increased competence in vocabulary, comprehension effectiveness, flexibility of rate and various reference skills have not been developed. But these items alone will not automatically help the student in his independence of study. The position taken here is that the teacher occupies the crucial role and he guides the student in study technique by both example and direction.

Footnotes

1. A. Sterl Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading (International Reading Association Reading Association Research Fund Monograph, Newark, Delaware, 1968), p. 107.
2. Maurice Williams and Sylvia Black, "Assignments: Key to Achievement," Journal of Reading, XII (Nov., 1968), p. 129.
3. Ned D. Marksheffel, Better Reading in the Secondary School (The Ronald Press Co., New York, 1966), p. 216.
4. Harold L. Herber, Teaching Reading in Content Areas, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), pp. 156-157.
5. Ronald L. Cramer, "Setting Purposes and Making Predictions: Essential to Critical Reading," Journal of Reading, XIII (Jan., 1970), p. 260.
6. E. P. Robinson, "Study Skills for Superior Students in Secondary School," Developing High School Reading Programs, Comp. by Mildred H. Dawson, (International Reading Association, Newark, Delaware, 1967), p. 126.